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Title: Review of Undoing Apartheid by Premesh Lalu

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Review of Undoing Apartheid by Premesh Lalu

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There is a growing realization in academia that the segregationist policy of apartheid, as enforced in South Africa between 1948 and 1994, constitutes one of the most important ideological constructs to analyse as a specially engineered state violence that targeted the minds of the populace. Nyasha Mboti for example has been developing the field of "apartheid studies" as a discipline that formally gauges the workings of apartheid as both a theoretical and methodological concern (*Apartheid Studies: A manifesto*, 2022), it is however not possible to make the lived reality under this subjection available for study in any sufficient way.

It is inevitably the experiencing, the encounter "in the flesh" of the apartheid era that shaped and changed scholars in fundamental ways to enable authentic testimonial critique.

The challenge then, for many who write after the time of apartheid and who wish to understand the machinery of the regime as a daily functioning reality between humans is: how to account for the divisive power of apartheid, that is to say how to understand the decisive and enduring positioning of some in the narrow group of racial privilege (read white/European), and others as disenfranchised underlings (black/non-European), while simultaneously sustaining its sophistry by perpetuating this chosen hierarchy and unit of measure using the very racial group that it sought to denigrate.

This is precisely where Lalu's *Undoing Apartheid* can provide a unique contribution to the study of apartheid by tracking it through the deployment of aesthetics and psycho-technics rehearsed in specific artworks that still remain. The text is a major contribution to the study of techne in Africa, used here to describe specialized artistic method that orchestrates predetermined desires.

The book comprises 202 pages with many illustrations, including 15 high-quality full colour images in the centre of the book and a full colour front cover that depicts an ossified puppet created by Chumisa Fihla titled "Read man, read!". This artwork, the ossified puppet, serves the argument of the book symbolically and inaugurates the careful work that flows between its pages that seek to find ways for subjects in the post-apartheid to be activated by thinking despite their apparent stasis.

This is achieved by an array of arguments spread out over the chapters that are variously linked to seminal artworks of diverse times and places such as the painting of Francis Danby from 1828 (*Opening of the Sixth Seal*), the work of William Kentridge and the Handspring Puppet Company (*Ubu and the Truth Commission*, 1997, *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, 1992), and the poems of Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney (*The Cure at Troy*, 1991), to name a few. These artists and artworks although varied, all serve as mnemotechnical allies in Lalu's quest to show the reader how to "undo" the workings of apartheid as a mental apparatus that must be put in its place to ensure its hegemony is challenged in the work of imagining futures for South Africans. The verb in the title of the book "Undoing Apartheid" is founded on a concept of actively releasing or dislodging. This idea

is very important to keep in mind when reading the book, as it refers the reader to the object that is bound together with apartheid, something that is manipulated through the tie/bind/knotting to apartheid: the human subject.

In the text, it is the puppet that becomes the stand in for the human and is invested with some of the most important ideas Lalu makes as he discusses puppets and their use in various artistic productions. Chapter Four for example: *Woyzeck and the Secret Life of Apartheid's Things* is the point of epistemic innovation by Lalu that demonstrates the careful thinking required to un-do much of what was inherited in the apartheid era for those willing to think through the arguments and attend to the object lessons that Lalu offers to make visible how sense-perception played such a leading role in apartheid trickery. The puppet itself is clearly marked in the text as the didactic key to understanding "subjective uncertainties" plotted for South Africans who endured the apartheid period. As Lalu states:

> The puppet allows us to access something specific about the relationship between race to the experience of apartheid. It conveys a duality of subjectivity…how grand and petty articulations of apartheid tracked and predicted the movement and behaviour of the subject by depleting the psychic resources of causality. (106)

I am struck by the *apperceptive schema* of apartheid Lalu makes visible through his text. This schema was a major tool used to derange self-judgement and self-estimation of subjects – the battleground for the psycho-technics of Hendrik Verwoerd (known as the father of the race-based system of subjugation institutionalized as "apartheid"), who was influenced in this area of study partly by Wilhelm Wundt and trained in the laboratories of Leipzig. This schema is explicitly named by Lalu:

> By interiorizing subjection, and externally controlling and manipulating the sources of stimulation, a residual consciousness retreats in search of an elusive inner core…apartheid mobilized a trick of subjection by design while making the subject responsible for its own redemption. What it hoped to achieve was to make race a matter of endless pursuit: a self-perpetuating mythology that repeated with every movement the desire it communicated. (125)

The production of meaning in this vein via the puppet and other artworks that makes visible an invisible psychological apparatus of the apartheid state is not only new, but profound in the development of aesthetic education in South Africa.

At the Michaelis School of Fine Art where I currently serve as Director, there have been special committees developed to establish what a curriculum would look like in the Arts to unleash human potential. This task is ongoing, yet Lalu offers a text that engages artworks to make them serve a critique of apartheid that allows many still moving in its shadow to step beyond its dark silhouette. Indeed, Lalu demonstrates how theatre productions and artistic mnemotechnics still hold power to make meaning for us and for others, especially important to recognize in the age of biological racism. This book thus represents aesthetic education at its very best, as it bolsters artworks to, as delineated by Charles Molesworth ("Ethnography, Art, and Justice: The Example of William Kentridge," 2006, 41) in his writing on art and justice, "retain its position as part of an intellectual tradition that questions the system by which meanings are generated and circulated in the consciousness".

Lalu has, in my estimation, not only showed us a potential path to undo apartheid by placing the reflection on affective art at the centre of the praxis of undoing, but he has also moreover, shown us precisely how we have been bound, and where to find apartheids knots inside ourselves.

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